



CARE SHEET FOR ERYTHRONIUM

One of the ‘signature’ plants in the gardens is *Erythronium revolutum*. Native from British Columbia thru portions of northern California, this springtime ephemeral is a delight. Going by many common names, *Erythronium* species are called ‘Avalanche lily’, ‘Dogtooth Violet’ and ‘Fawn lily’. The bulb, when mature, does resemble a canine tooth (well, not a Chihuahua, more a German Shepherd).

Foliage will emerge early to mid-spring, with leaf patterning ranging from nearly plain green to heavily mottled with various browns on green. Ed observed that slugs ignored the heavily mottled forms, while devouring the plain green ones. This seems to have been an accurate observation, as there are no totally green forms present in the garden. Our localized Darwinian process has proven accurate.

The flowers emerge, an elegant unfurling pagoda roof or Turk’s cap, once the foliage has flushed out. Depending on the year, the flowers may last ten days or three weeks, as they are heat sensitive. As the petals dry up and fall off, the seedpod will hopefully start to swell. If pollination has been successful, leave the flowering stem in situ, until the pod splits open of its own accord. Often, we’ll scatter the seed in a newly cleared area, which isn’t too heavily colonized by other plants.

With luck, germination will occur the following spring. Remember where you scattered the seeds. The first spring at the garden, I was conscientiously weeding, when it struck me that the “grass” I was pulling up didn’t really look like grass... Lo and behold, I had been weeding out *E. revolutum*! A way to discern the good from the bad is, *E. revolutum* will keep the seed capsule at the top of the emergent shoot, at least for a while. Grasses don’t and they usually continue top growth, the first season, which the erythronium won’t.

The second year, the plant will go from being grass like to having its first leaf. By the third year, if happy, it may flower. To encourage this, we will liquid feed with a half-strength fertilizer, every two weeks, during the active growth period. If possible, it is best to spread seed of this plant yearly, as we’ve found that the bulbs will decline with age (a decade or so is most likely a good lifespan).

As the bulb goes dormant, May into June, resist the temptation to remove the dying foliage. Again, even though you might think that the bulb can’t possibly be taking energy from the yellowing foliage, it or the seed-head is.

Don’t plant this bulb in an area that contains ‘aggressive’ plants, as it does not do well with heavy competition. At the garden these bulbs have coexisted with *Cyclamen hederifolium* beautifully, as the cyclamen have or are dying down by the time the erythronium emerge, and the new leaves of the cyclamen unfurl in August-long after the foliage of the erythronium have shriveled up. They are perfectly adapted to our Maritime Pacific Northwest climate, and need no summer irrigation, though they will take some in stride.